DC

JUSTICE LEAGUE® TASK FORCE™

37 AUG 96

FINAL ISSUE!

PRIEST
BERNADO
NAPOLITANO

Rejoice

CHRISTMAS...

ALERT!

WE'VE BEEN BACK WHAT--AN *HOUR*-- AND *ALREADY* A *TASK FORCE ALERT?!*

DON'T SUPER-VILLAINS AND MARAUDING SPACE ARMADAS KNOW IT'S *CHRISTMAS?!?*

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NOT THAT IT MAKES ANY DIFFERENCE, THE WAY *MY* LIFE IS GOING, NEVER REALIZED HOW *ALONE* I AM--

--UNTIL *TODAY.* UNTIL *CHRISTMAS.*

AT LEAST A GOOD OL' LIFE-AND-DEATH BATTLE WILL BREAK UP MY *DAY.*

GYPSY--TRIUMPH--ME--WE'RE ALL EACH OTHER'S *GOT.*

I'M SURPRISED WE DON'T ALL LIVE IN ONE BIG *LOFT* AND DRINK LOTS OF *CAPPUCCINO.*

IT'S LIKE I NEED THEM TO KEEP MY *BALANCE*--REMIND ME WHO I *AM.*

I'M ACTUALLY *GLAD* WE'LL BE SPENDING CHRISTMAS TOGETHER--

... BATTLING Dr. STRANGEJOY OR SOMEBODY...

HMMM... BETTER START THINKING UP SOME GOOD *RANKS* FOR WHEN WILL INEVITABLY POPS OFF AT ME...

THE *BEACON* IS LEADING ME HERE TO THE MARTIAN MANHUNTER'S *CABIN*--INSTEAD OF THE TF's BOSTON HQ.

THAT *CAN'T* BE GOOD.

BETTER SUCK IT IN--*ANYTHING* COULD BE WAITING FOR ME IN HERE--

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!

MERRY CHRISTMAS, RAY.

--?! GYPSY-- THIS IS WHAT THAT ALERT WAS ALL ABOUT--?!

JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE YOU SHOWED UP. YOU'VE BEEN SO ON AND OFF LATELY.

MISS YOU, RAY--

YEAH, IT'S BEEN AWHILE SINCE THE JLA--

--THEN AGAIN, I AM PRETTY WASTED--

HERE, Y'GO, SPORT--PUT ANOTHER HAIR ON YOUR CHEST--

BLUE BEETLE--MASTER COMEDIAN...

WELL, J'ONN-- LOOKS LIKE MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.

ALMOST. WE'RE STILL MISSING A MAN. HOW UNLIKE HIM TO IGNORE AN ALERT--

J'ONN--THIS CHRISTMAS RITUAL-- ANY OF IT INVOLVE COUGHING UP THE 80 GRAND YOU PEOPLE OWE ME--?

ANOTHER TIME, GAMMERON--

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

--WHA-- YOU--?!?

SANTA--!!

HO-HO-HO!!!

MERRY CHRISTMAS !!!

YEAH, YEAH, WHAT'S IN THE *BAG*, FAT BOY ?

FOR *YOU*, BLUE BEETLE--? A LUMP OF *COAL*.

HO-HO-HO-HO-HO-!!

I AM PLEASED YOU DECIDED TO COME, SANTA-- GIVEN OUR *HISTORY*.

CHRISTMAS IS FOR *REJOICING*, J'ONN--A TIME FOR *NEW BEGINNINGS*--

--AND *FORGIVE-NESS*.

YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT ME, J'ONN, I WAS HEADSTRONG --IMPULSIVE--

--STUPID.

FROM THE VERY *BEGINNING*-- A *DECADE* LOST BECAUSE I WOULDN'T LISTEN TO YOU.*

FOLLOWED BY MORE THAN A *YEAR* OF EVEN *MORE* MISTAKES--

--DRIVEN BY *JEALOUSY* AND *RAGE*. I FOCUSED ALL THAT ON *YOU*, J'ONN--

--BUT NOW I REALIZE-- I WAS *ANGRIEST* WITH *MYSELF*.

--NOT THAT ONE-- THE *BIG* ONE--

*SEE JLA #92--*Roo*

AN *HOURGLASS*, TRIUMPH?

SOME *SYMBOLISM* HERE, PERHAPS --?

I'VE CONTAINED AN INVERSE POLARIZATION FIELD IN THE BASE --

--MAKING *TIME* RUN *BACKWARDS*.

PERHAPS THOSE YEARS IN LIMBO WEREN'T A *COMPLETE* WASTE. MAYBE YOU AND I CAN START AGAIN.

I WOULD WELCOME THAT.

YOU *BELIEVE* THAT?! WILL--*GROWING UP!*

ACTUALLY, I FIND IT A LITTLE *ANNOYING*.

I'VE GOTTA CHOKE ON 10 PERFECTLY GOOD RANK-OUTS -- HEY--!! WHAT ARE YOU--?!

WHAT'S IT *LOOK* LIKE, FLASHBULB? *SHAKE* THAT THING!

BUT-- GYPSY-- I--

SHUT UP AND *SHAKE!*

SEVERAL DANCES LATER...

--AND THE FIELD'S FLUX DENSITY, CALCULATED TO THE NEAREST POWER, GIVES YOU A BASE RATIO OF THIRTEEN PARTS PER CUBIC METER--

YOU FORGOT TO CARRY THE ONE. *hic.*

FASCINATING...

--THE *QUANTUM FIELD*, huh? PROPELLED YOU 25 YEARS INTO THE *FUTURE*...

SO *I'M* NOT THE *ONLY* ONE WHO'S LOST TEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE... NOT AS... ALONE... AS I THOUGHT...

AND STILL MORE DANCING...

I WILL CONFESS TO AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE FOR INVITING THE TWO OF YOU.

I SUSPECTED AS MUCH, MANHUNTER--

--SOME *MESS* YOU WANT *MY* TEAM TO CLEAN UP?

NATHANIEL...

THE THREE OF US--*LEADERS* OF THE THREE JUSTICE LEAGUE TEAMS--OFTEN SEEM TO BE WORKING AT *ODDS* WITH ONE ANOTHER.

THOUGH I HAVE MADE MYSELF AND MY TASK FORCE AVAILABLE TO BOTH WONDER WOMAN AND YOURSELF, CAPTAIN--

--THERE REMAINS A CLIMATE OF *RIVALRY* THAT IS BOTH *UNPRODUCTIVE* AND *ILL-ADVISED*--

Oh--*REALLY*--?

--WELL, *YOU* WEREN'T *AROUND* WHEN DIANA AND HER PALS *SHOWED* US THE *DOOR*, J'ONN!

NATHANIEL...

YEAH, THAT'S IT, DIANA --PATRONIZE ME. YOU'RE *GOOD* AT THAT.

KIDS... KIDS...

--C'MON--IT'S *CHRISTMAS*.

I'M SURE WE CAN *EAT* ALL THOSE *HARD FEELINGS*, ESPECIALLY NOW THAT ATOM AND I'VE DISCOVERED WE HAVE SO MUCH IN *COMMON*--

--AND NOW THAT I'M *BACK* ON THE *TEAM*--

WHO SAID YOU WERE *BACK*, TRIUMPH?

--?! WHAT-- I DON'T UNDER-STAND...

YOU WERE *FIRED* FOR BEING BRASH, UNDISCIPLINED, SELF-ABSORBED--A *DANGER* TO YOUR-SELF AND YOUR *TEAM.*

BUT--I'VE *CHANGED*-- SINCE WE *LEFT* FOR XANTHCAR--

--J'ONN-- I THOUGHT WE'D PUT THIS ALL *BEHIND* US--

WE HAVE.

THAT HAS NO BEARING, HOW-EVER, ON YOUR TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP.

BUT-- BUT--

NEVER GROVEL, KID. EFF 'EM. YOU CAN JOIN *MY* TEAM.

WHAT-- *THAT* PACK OF *LOSERS*--?!

LOSERS? HEH. ONE WORD, PAL: "*DESPERO.*"

SO HOW ABOUT I CAVE IN THAT *FLAT HEAD* OF YOURS, TIN MAN?!

KID, IF YOU EVEN *DREAMED* ABOUT TAKING ME ON, YOU'D WAKE UP WITH YOUR BUTT KICKED.

I'M NOT A KID!!

YAH, GOT IT.

TRIUMPH-- CALM DOWN--

YOU DON'T GIVE ORDERS AROUND HERE, LADY!!

Ah-- *MUCH* BETTER --!

WELL NOW-- REASONABLE TO *INFANT* IN UNDER AN *HOUR.*

A NEW PERSONAL BEST.

I FEEL A *RANK-OUT* COMING ON--

--HEY-- YO--*SLEIGH BOY*--!!

SHUT UP, RAY.

WE'RE ALL SO DAMNED *SUPERIOR*, AREN'T WE --?!

ESPECIALLY *YOU*, MARTIAN.

ZZZZZM

GET YOUR HANDS OFF OF ME!!

I *TRIED*-- I *BELIEVED* IN YOU --AND *THIS* IS HOW YOU *REPAY* MY *LOYALTY*--?!

ALL RIGHT, JUNIOR-- THAT'S *ENOUGH*--

KER-ROOM!

Uh-oh--

IS THAT-- WHO I THINK IT IS--?

÷choke÷

I'LL BET THIS CAN'T BE GOOD...

MAYBE IF WE ALL RAN FOR OUR LIVES...

TOO LATE.

NOW--*MAXIMA* --HOLD ON-- TRIUMPH DIDN'T MEAN--

THIS... INDIGNITY... CAN MEAN BUT *ONE* THING--

FIGHT!!!

J'ONN-- SHOULD I--?

NO, DIANA, ALLOW ME.

STOP.

MUCH BETTER.

SAYS YOU, MARTIAN--

--BUT NOT FOR ME.

YOU'VE MADE A FOOL OF ME FOR THE LAST TIME.

TRIUMPH--

--YOU ARE PROVING MY POINT.

GOOD.
GLAD NOT TO DISAPPOINT YOU.
J'ONN-- WE CAN'T--WE SHOULDN'T JUST--LET HIM GO--!!
NO, GYPSY-- THAT IS *PRECISELY* WHAT WE SHOULD DO.
...AT THE TONE... THE CORRECT TIME IS...
I NEED A LIFT.
GYPSY-- J'ONN'S RIGHT-- WILL'S JUST BEING A BONE-HEAD.
NOT THIS TIME--SOMETHING'S *TERRIBLY* WRONG, RAY--I CAN *FEEL* IT.
RAY--
--HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I *EVER* ASKED YOU FOR A *FAVOR*--?!
SO, J'ONZZ--I SUPPOSE THAT MAKES YOU THE *BIG MAN*--?!
DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'D WANNA GO THREE OUT OF FIVE FALLS--?
NATHANIEL-- *GROW UP* ALREADY--
WELL, NOW--WHAT HAVE WE *HERE*--?

--A FESTIVE GATHERING OF *CLOSE FRIENDS?* A PICTURE PRINT BY CURRIER AND IVES--?

WHA-- *VANDAL SAVAGE* --?!

YES, OF COURSE.

I'VE GOT HIM--!!

CAPTAIN-- MY RESEARCH INDICATES YOUR TEAM TO BE POSSESSED OF-- SHALL WE SAY-- MORE *LINEAR* INSTINCTS.

FOR EVEN A *CURSORY* EXAMINATION OF MY *RECORD* WOULD CONFIRM--

--I AM *NEVER* CAUGHT *UNPREPARED.*

A SIMPLE ENERGY REFRACTION WAVE WILL CHANNEL ENOUGH OF YOUR OWN ENERGY BACK INTO YOU TO PUSH YOU INTO THE *QUANTUM FIELD*--

--AND *OUT* OF MY *GRAND ENTRANCE.*

SPEAK YOUR PEACE AND BE GONE, SAVAGE-- BEFORE YOU *ANGER* ME.

PEACE, OLD FRIEND, IS *PRECISELY* THE POINT OF THIS MISSION.

THIS DAY MARKS THE *END* OF *HOSTILITIES* BETWEEN US. *

YOU HAVE COME TO DECLARE DÉTENTE--?

HARDLY. THE MATTER HAS BEEN TAKE *OUT* OF OUR *HANDS. NERON,* OUR MUTUAL ADVERSARY, HAS SEEN TO THAT.

IN A MATTER OF MOMENTS...

*A FUED THAT BEGAN WAY BACK IN TF #20--Roo

"...YOUR *STUDENT* SHALL CHANGE THE COURSE OF OUR DESTINY *FOREVER.*"

DAMN.

WHAT THE *BLAZES* IS *WRONG* WITH ME?!

CAN'T BELIEVE I-- *EXPLODED*-- LIKE THAT.

ACTUALLY-- YES--I *CAN* BELIEVE IT. IT'S *JUST* LIKE ME.

JUST LIKE THE 21-YEAR-OLD *KID* WHO WAS BLASTED INTO *LIMBO* A DECADE AGO.

THIS THING-- *NERON'S CANDLE*-- CAN *CHANGE* ALL THAT--GIVE ME THOSE YEARS *BACK*--

--IN EXCHANGE FOR MY *SOUL.* ALL I HAVE TO DO IS *LIGHT* THIS THING-- AND I *ERASE* A *DECADE'S* WORTH OF MISTAKES--

--INCLUDING TONIGHT--

WILL--

LEAVE IT ALONE, GYPSY.

CAN'T. DON'T WANT TO.

YOU NEED ME NOW.

DO I--?

J'ONN'S RIGHT. I'M A POOR EXCUSE FOR A HERO. THE WORST.

FROM DAY ONE IT'S BEEN *ONE* MISTAKE AFTER ANOTHER-- ALWAYS *MY* SCREW-UP --ALWAYS SOMEONE *ELSE* PAYING FOR IT.

OR HAVE YOU ALREADY FORGOTTEN --?

--MYSTEK--?

SHE WAS PARANOID--SCARED--SHE WANTED SOMEONE TO *TRUST.*

I COULDN'T SEE BEYOND MY *OWN AMBITION.* MISSED WHAT WAS *RIGHT* IN *FRONT* OF ME.

BEGINNING TO THINK... MAYBE... I NEED A WHOLE NEW START...

BULL. LOOK, WILL, YOU CAN'T BE *ALL* BAD--YOU *SAVED* MY *LIFE.* *

YOU JUST DON'T *GET* IT, DO YOU?

GYPSY--I WAS GOING TO *LET YOU DIE*--JUST LIKE I LET *MYSTEK* DIE.

I WAS *TOO SCARED* TO GO AFTER YOU--I THOUGHT BETTER *YOU* THAN *ME*--

*ISH #32--R.Loo

--AFTER ALL, *I* WAS THE ONE WITH THE *DESTINY*--WHILE *YOU* WERE JUST A PETTY *THIEF.*

NICE TRY, WILL.

YOU RISKED *EVERYTHING* TO SAVE ME.

SURE I DID--BECAUSE I *KNEW* IT WOULD *LOOK* BAD IF I *DIDN'T!*

GYPSY--I *WEIGHED* THE *PROS* AND *CONS* OF *SAVING YOU*--THEN I LET YOU *BELIEVE* I WAS SOME KIND OF *HERO!!*

WAKE THE HELL UP..!!

THWAAACK!

I SUPPOSE I DESERVED THAT.

WILL-- YOU SAVED ME. YOU *DID.*

HOW YOU CAME TO THAT DECISION DOESN'T MATTER. NOW, SEE, THE WAY *I* SEE IT--

--ONE GOOD SAVE... DESERVES ANOTHER...

Uh-oh--

--SHOULDN'TA DONE THAT, Huh--?

PROBABLY NOT.

DEFINITELY NOT.

GUYS-- THIS IS *REALLY* GROSS.

WHY DON'T YOU TWO JUST GET A *ROOM* ALREADY.

THAT'S IT, RAY-- YOCK IT UP. NOW IS THE TOTALLY APPROPRIATE TIME.

LOOK, WILL-- IT'S EITHER MAKE *FUN* OF YOU OR *THROW UP*. YOU DO THE MATH.

Oh, WISDOM FROM A GUY WHO CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *SNAP* AND *CRACKLE*.

HEY, DOOF-- YOU CAN *KISS* MY CRACKLE!!

OR-- ARE YOU TOO BUSY *FRENCHING* YOUR *SISTER*--?!?

BETTER THAN SOME *35-YEAR-OLD* IN *FISHNETS*!!

LET'S LEAVE YOUR *DAD* OUT OF THIS!

IF YOU WERE *HALF* THE MAN MY DAD IS--

--I'D BE A *QUARTER* OF A MAN!!

I'D BE A *MANLET*!!

LET'S LEAVE YOUR *MOM* OUT OF THIS--

--ALTHOUGH SHE *IS* TWICE THE MAN YOUR *DAD* IS--

--AND HAS THE *MUSTACHE* TO *PROVE* IT--!!

BACK AT THE PARTY...

YOU'VE HAD YOUR SAY, VANDAL. NOW GET OUT BEFORE I THROW YOU OUT.

MY DEAR MARTIAN-- THERE'S NO NEED FOR THREATS--

--AFTER ALL, WHO CAN SAY THAT WE'LL EVEN KNOW EACH OTHER ONCE YOUR STUDENT CONSUMMATES NERON'S DEAL.

I DARESAY ANY MOMENT NOW YOU MAY NOT EVEN REMEMBER I WAS HERE--

TRUE, I WAS READY TO ACCEPT NERON'S DEAL. BUT THEN IT HIT ME--I FINALLY REALIZED--

--PERHAPS I'D GAIN BACK THOSE YEARS I LOST-- BUT I'D ALSO LOSE SOMETHING PRECIOUS--

--SOMETHING EVEN NERON CAN'T DEAL ME OUT OF.

--I WOULDN'T BET ON IT, CAVE MAN.

YES, OF COURSE.

J'ONN-- ARE THERE ANY MORE TUNA SANDWICHES--?

I WAS OUT OF LINE. I WAS WRONG.

YOU WERE ALMOST TOAST.

ENOUGH, CAPTAIN ATOM. TRIUMPH'S APOLOGY IS MORE THAN SUFFICIENT.

WHERE ARE GYPSY AND RAY--?

"Oh-- THEY STAYED BEHIND A MINUTE TO TAKE CARE OF SOMETHING."

SHE HAD *SO MUCH POTENTIAL*--

GYPSY--

--SHE WAS A LOUD-MOUTHED BUTTINSKY PEST. LET'S NOT GET CARRIED *AWAY* HERE.

RAY-- WHEN SOMEBODY *DIES*-- THEY GET A *FREE PASS*, Y'KNOW?

WE LIKE TO THINK ONLY THE *BEST* OF THEM.

TOO BAD IT'S MADE OF *SAND*-- THAT IT'LL JUST *BLOW AWAY*--

MAYBE NOT.

A CONTROLLED *HEAT BLAST* ALONG WITH *MODULATING FREQUENCIES* OF *SOLID LIGHT* CREATE A *PRESSURE FIELD*--

--AND *VOILÀ!* GENUINE LEAD CRYSTAL. QUITE A BIT MORE *DURABLE*.

NOW, WILL THAT BE *CASH*, *CHARGE*--

--OR WHAT SAY YOU JUST PLANT ONE ON ME LIKE YOU DID WILL--

"*YOU NEED ME NOW!! I'M HERE FOR YOU--!*

"*--ONE GOOD SAVE DESERVES ANOTHER --!!*"

NEVER GONNA LIVE THAT *DOWN*, AM I?

NOT A CHANCE.

IT'S LOVELY--

"BUT--"

--IT *NEEDS* SOME-THING--

GOT IT.

HOW ABOUT SOME KIND OF *ETERNAL FLAME* DEAL--?

MAYBE THAT'S WHAT WILL HAD IN *MIND* FOR THIS THING--

--UGLY AS SIN, BUT IT'LL HAVE TO DO--

NAH.

BETTER *WITHOUT.*

THAT'S BECAUSE *YOU'RE* A *MAN.*

OH, RIGHT. GO FOR THE *OBVIOUS.* GYPSY-- IT'S *HIDEOUS.*

SAYS *YOU.*

C'MON, RAY--*LIGHT* THE THING ALREADY...

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!

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MERRY CHRISTMAS, RAY.

--?! GYPSY-- *THIS* IS WHAT THAT *ALERT* WAS ALL ABOUT--?!

JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE YOU SHOWED UP. YOU'VE BEEN SO *ON* AND *OFF* LATELY.

WELL, J'ONN-- LOOKS LIKE MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.

ALMOST. WE'RE STILL *MISSING* A MAN. HOW *UNLIKE* HIM TO IGNORE AN *ALERT*--

J'ONN--THIS *CHRISTMAS* RITUAL-- ANY OF IT INVOLVE COUGHING UP THE *80 GRAND* YOU PEOPLE OWE ME--?

ANOTHER *TIME*, GAMMERON--

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

WHA-- *YOU*-- ?!?

SANTA --!!

HO-HO-*HO!!*

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MERRY CHRISTMAS !!!

YEAH, YEAH, WHAT'S IN THE *BAG*, FAT BOY ?

FOR *YOU*, BLUE BEETLE--? A LUMP OF *COAL*.

HO-HO-HO-HO-HO-!!

I AM PLEASED YOU DECIDED TO COME, SANTA --GIVEN OUR *HISTORY*.

CHRISTMAS IS FOR *REJOICING*, J'ONN--A TIME FOR *NEW BEGINNINGS*--

--AND *FORGIVE-NESS*.

I APOLOGIZE FOR MY HASTY *EXIT* FROM *XANTHCAR*. MY OPTIONS APPEARED SOMEWHAT *LIMITED*.

THIS *GIFT* IS FOR *GLENN GAMMERON*--

--WHILE I REALIZE NO AMOUNT OF *MONEY* CAN RESTORE YOUR *TARNISHED REPUTATION*--

--*80,000 CREDITS* SURE DOES COME *CLOSE*, DESPERO--

--uh-- I MEAN--

--*MERRY CHRISTMAS!*

--uh-- I MEAN *L-RON*--

WHAT'S IT *LOOK* LIKE, FLASHBULB! *SHAKE* THAT THING!

BUT-- GYPSY-- I--

SHUT UP AND *SHAKE!*

SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT...

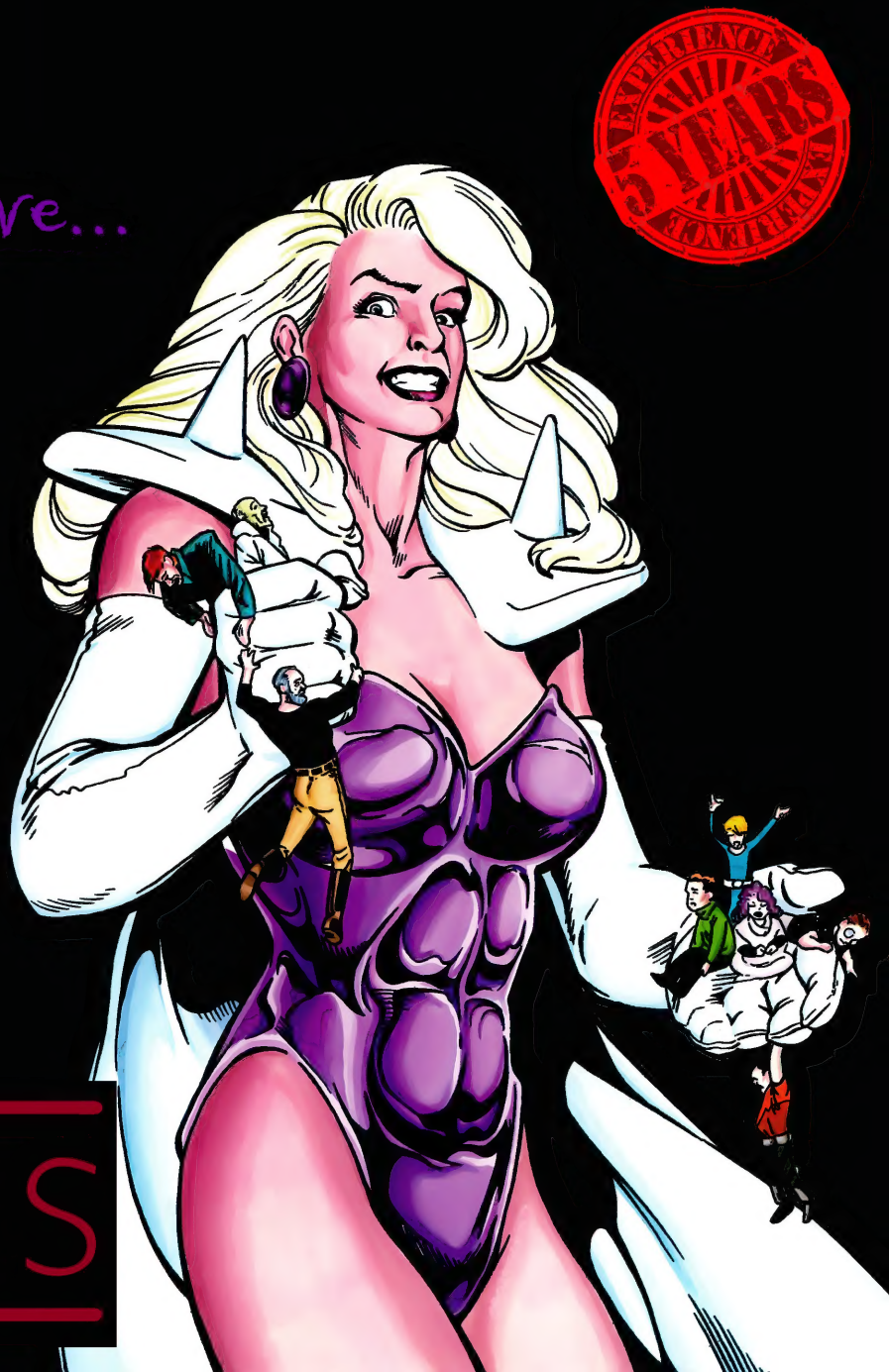
...AND NEVER BROUGHT TO MIND...

...WE'LL TAKE A CUP OF KINDNESS YET...

...FOR AULD LANG SYNE...

THE END

From Baaldur, with love...



GLORITH

novus